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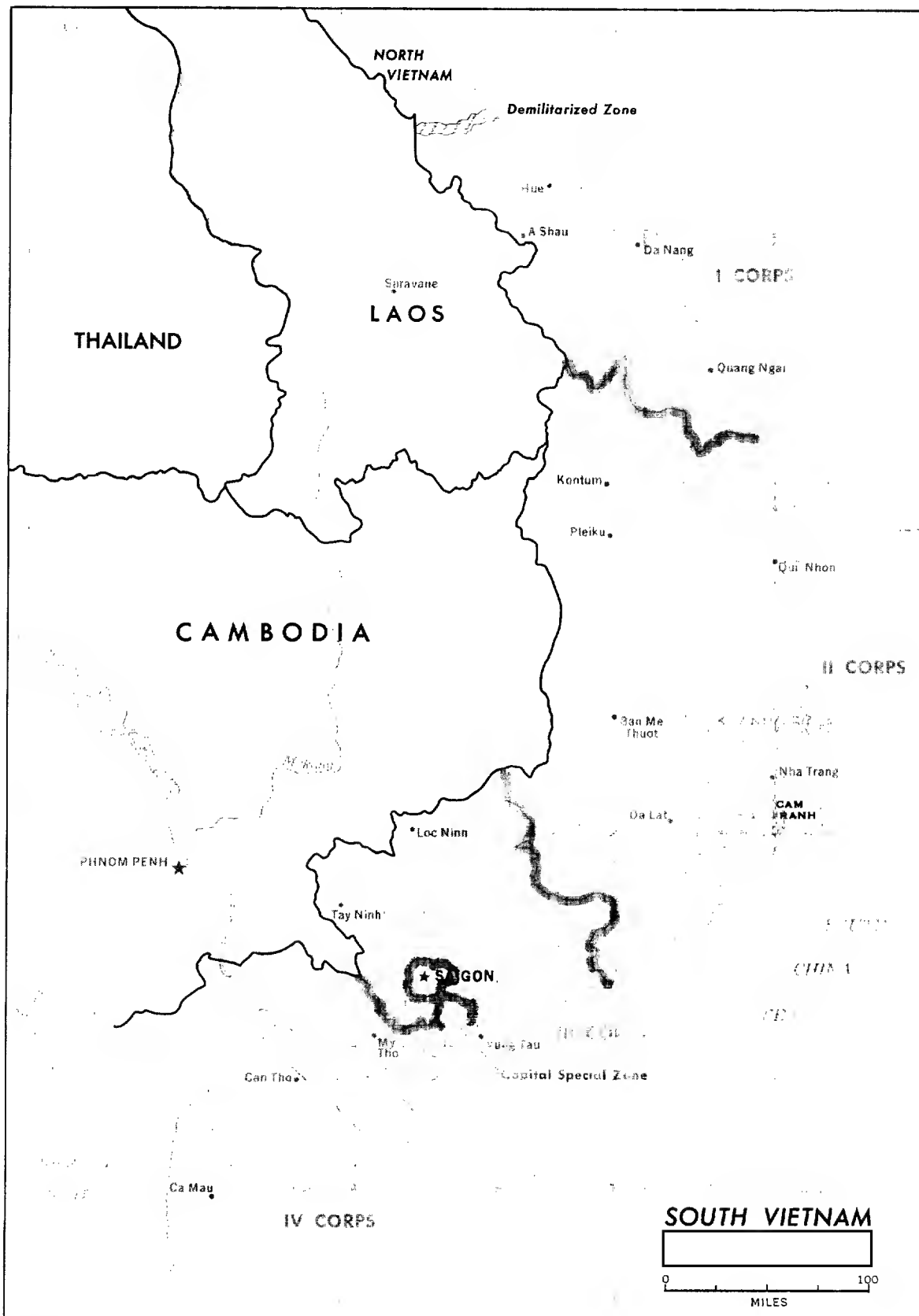
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[Vietnam: Enemy-initiated military activity has remained at a low level, but there are more indications of attack preparations in III Corps.

Shellings and terrorist attacks were stepped up somewhat in the Saigon area on 20 December, the eighth anniversary of the formation of the National Liberation Front. Communist elements launched ten mortar rounds from the southern part of the Demilitarized Zone on 19 December against a US Marine position but they caused no casualties or damage. This was the first such attack reported from the zone since 24 November.

* * * *

The Communist drive to set up an administrative apparatus in the form of "liberation committees" in South Vietnam seems to have slowed recently.

There have been fewer reports of the establishment of new village committees in the past three weeks, although one new province-level committee was announced on 16 December. The slowdown may reflect completion of current plans. A recent Communist broadcast, for example, claimed that so-called "revolutionary administrations" have already been set up in "almost all liberated areas."

It is also possible, however, that these political activities have been curtailed temporarily while the enemy is preoccupied with preparations for the military-political push of this year's winter-spring campaign. In the past, a chronic shortage of cadre has often forced the Communists to soft-pedal work on longer range political activities in order to support more immediate objectives. The accelerated allied pacification program and special efforts to root out the Viet Cong infrastructure may also be hindering the development of liberation committees.

 (Map)]

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Afghanistan: Prime Minister Etemadi's health may again be deteriorating.

The US ambassador reports that during a two-hour conversation on 16 December the prime minister delivered a long, emotional monologue. Etemadi talked compulsively, was visibly upset, and seemed to be overly concerned about difficulties facing his government. He was evidently under great strain and studiously ignored inquiries about his health.

This uncharacteristic performance/

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may indicate a recurrence of the prime minister's illness of last summer. At that time, speculation was rife in Kabul that the King would have to replace him. Etemadi, however, apparently recovered and returned to his work seemingly in excellent health.

If Etemadi is on the verge of another illness, King Zahir will again come under pressure to appoint a new prime minister. The King reportedly wants to keep Etemadi on until the elections in the fall of 1969, however, and is not likely to bow to pressure unless Etemadi becomes completely unable to carry on.

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Poland: Government personnel changes announced yesterday may give a new look to Polish foreign and economic policies, but portend no major departures from party leader Gomulka's conservative approach.

Stefan Jedrychowski, hitherto Poland's chief economic planner, takes over the post of foreign minister from veteran Adam Rapacki, whose political demise was sealed at the party congress last month. Jedrychowski is a trusted and capable supporter of Gomulka, but had been criticized by party hard-liners for his economic performance. He is unlikely to play a major role in foreign policymaking, which will continue to be under Gomulka's purview. Jedrychowski's successor in the economic planning post is another able but little known economist with a trade union background.

Two deputy premiers, one of them associated with the economic area, and Foreign Trade Minister Trampczynski have also been relieved of their jobs. No immediate successors for them were named. Trampczynski, however, has been appointed to another key economic post.

These and other announced shifts in the government's economic and scientific hierarchy suggest that economic policies, both foreign and domestic, are near the top of the regime's concerns. There is probably general agreement between Gomulka and his party critics to streamline and reinvigorate these areas without immediate shifts in basic policies.

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Rumania: Party chief Ceausescu reinforced his already strong position at a party plenum this week. Three "Ceausescu men" of relatively recent prominence and typical of the younger Communist nationalists were elected to full membership in the party's executive committee, replacing three members who have been in ill health for some time. A fourth Ceausescu supporter was elected party secretary. [REDACTED]

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Argentina: The navy commander in chief has announced that Argentina will purchase two submarines from West Germany. The two 1,100-ton boats reportedly are to be manufactured in West Germany, with final assembly to be completed in Argentina. The next step in the navy's modernization program is likely to be the acquisition of a British destroyer [REDACTED]
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